



**Testimony of Denique Weidema-Lewis  
Director of Prevention, Positive Directions**

**\*H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET**

*February 23 2017 Appropriations Subcommittee on Health Public Hearing  
Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services, Regional Mental Health Boards*

Dear: Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Senator Markley, Representative Dillon and members of the Appropriations Subcommittee:

My name is Denique Weidema-Lewis and I am the Director of Prevention at Positive Directions located in Westport; as an agency, we provide prevention and counseling services for the communities of Westport, Wilton, Weston, Fairfield, and Norwalk. I am writing today to strongly oppose the cuts to Regional Mental Health Boards (RMHBs).

Currently, the \$585,000 cut would eliminate the (5) Regional Mental Health Boards. With an average of 2 staff each, they mobilize over 500 volunteers collectively, whose activities and programming affects tens of thousands of the at-large communities. Talk about a **RETURN ON INVESTMENT**- for only a little over \$100,000 a piece, RMHBs are able to mobilize incredible activity within their regions! Based on the value of Volunteer Time (which is made available by Independent Sector), the current rate is \$23.56 per hour (as of 2015). Consider- if every volunteer gave a minimum of 60 hours a year (on average 5 hours/month), it would mean in-kind support totaling \$706,800 annually, far surpassing the state investment! All of this energy and support goes away without having passionate and committed Regional Mental Health Boards' direction in leading the charge to eliminate stigma and promote mental health, while shining the light on areas of improvement through the mental health system. Each board works with other community stakeholders like the Regional Action Councils to write a biannual priority report which identifies gaps in services on the regional level but most importantly enables the state to pursue additional funding opportunities. Specifically having had this collaboration has helped bring in \$23 million dollars in federal funds to the state.

For **40** years, these valuable agencies have been a vital liaison between the state, local communities and service providers to assess needs, evaluate services, and educate communities on a diverse range of mental health initiatives, concerns and opportunities. Outside of what I do professionally in the realm of substance misuse prevention and mental health promotion, I am a spouse of someone who struggles maintaining good mental health. I look to my Regional Mental Health Board (Southwest Regional Mental Health Board (SWRMHB), and its Catchment Area Councils (CACs), for support and perspective on resources that can benefit not only the people I come in contact with, but for him.

I strongly urge you to keep their funding intact; they are the safety net for a vulnerable and important population. Thank you for your continued efforts services and programs which support substance misuse prevention and mental health promotion.

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